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"GETTING READY" INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS PROGRAM:

A PROFESSIONAL ASSESSMENT

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Psychology:
Child Development

by
Luz Maria Varela
September 2007

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Luz Maria Varela

September 2007


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ABSTRACT

Statistics clearly point to the need for independent living programs, which provide practical daily living skills mainly in the areas of education, housing, and employment. This research project addresses some of the issues faced by foster youth. The purpose of this project was to evaluate an independent living skills pilot program entitled "Getting Ready" developed by this student. A focus group of ten professionals completed a qualitative and quantitative survey covering the areas of program viability, implementation, functioning, and general program-related questions. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and the result of this research will be utilized for the development and implementation of innovated programs to help foster youth with their transition to adulthood. The majority of the professional participants' qualitative responses indicated that the "Getting Ready" Independent Living Program would be helpful with foster youth facing emancipation process; as if this program has viability to be implemented. Some of the results provide criticism, suggestions, and praise for the program.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project has been one of the biggest challenges in my life. I have made a lot of sacrifices, put in a lot of effort and dedicated much of my time to this important project. To accomplish my goals, my personal time, my work, and my family time has had to be put on hold. I want to say thanks to my family for their patience and understanding; especially, my son Eidder and my husband Alex. Also, I am grateful to those who offer their grain of sand to build my dream: my friends Miste, Shomon, and my sister Sandra. Thanks guys for your time. I want to acknowledge my Advisor, Dr. David Chavez for guiding me during this hard process. Even though he is a busy man, Dr. Chavez was there to support me, to answer my questions and to teach me. Thanks Dr. Ricco and Dr. Kamptner, for having been part of my committee; you are wonderful teachers! But overall I want to thank my Lord and my God; without him I could not have done it. He gave me the strength, the support and the faith to complete my dream. I love you God!

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

For the majority of children, turning eighteen is an important step in their lives. Finally, they anxiously step forward through the doorway into adulthood. It is a time of traditional celebration, of high school proms, graduation ceremonies, going away parties, and senior trips.

For as many as 25,000 other children who reach their eighteenth birthday each year, the emotions are similar. However, there is a definitive difference; these children have spent all or most of their earlier years in foster care. These are young people who step through a doorway into a world full of unknowns, without the support and connections that other youth take for granted. Something happened in their lives that forever makes them different (Shirk & Stangler, 2004).

They were taken away from their families and placed in foster care, usually through no fault of their own. They were placed into a bureaucratic system composed by strangers, who had complete control over where they lived. The support in their lives were not necessarily people who

loved them, but people who were paid for the roles they played, such as judges, attorneys, social workers, certified parents, or workers in a group home, typically temporary individuals in their lives.

Additionally, the transition from childhood to adulthood has historically been problematic for this population. Try to imagine that you have just turned eighteen and have to leave your foster home. You may have some savings and probably received a one-time "emancipation" grant, but you don't have a job or a place to live. You have no idea where you'll sleep tonight, next week or next month. Your belongings are packed into three plastic bags. Your family is unable to help you and may not even be around. Whatever you are imagining as your destiny, the reality is worse for many youth who are "aged out". This is the term used in the field to describe those who turn eighteen and are yet in foster care.

From a young age, children living within the foster care system recognize that one day they may be left to fend for themselves. They understand that the system will not be there to help them make the important transition from being a dependent foster child to that of an independent adult. The foster care system will no longer provide financial and medical assistance and will offer

slight ongoing emotional support. When these individuals turn eighteen and are terminated from the foster care system, many of them are pushed out into a world that offers no parental care or social support networks. In addition, many leave having achieved minimal education, minimal work experience, little or no financial management. Also, they may not have daily skills experiences, as well as inadequate access to housing and transportation (Shirk & Stangler, 2004).

Unfortunately, adolescents who are deficient in many of these skills and resources are often socially and emotionally unprepared to deal with adulthood responsibilities. Adulthood is a stage full of stressors and major challenges that require preparation to face. Through the development and design of the "Getting Ready" Independent Living Program (ILP), the foster youth is provided the necessary resources to be successful after their emancipation.

The "Getting Ready" program is full of tools and practical information that will open doors for this population transitioning into the "real world". The student researcher has reviewed some of the studies that will provide the basis for developing the "Getting Ready" Independent Living Program.

Foster Care and Emancipation Process

Outcome studies done by Westat (1991), Barth (1990), Courtney and Piliavin (1998), have revealed that a substantial number of youth existing in the foster care system who have not participated in independent living programs are likely to once again become a cost to society. Their research indicated that many of these adolescents become homeless, are incarcerated and/or become dependent on public assistance during adulthood. The above-mentioned studies have shown that there is a great need to provide foster youth with appropriate living skills and training to become self-sufficient upon aging out.

Many of the case examples mentioned in this project are individuals from the Foster Family Agency that I currently service as a Social Worker. Their names have been changed to protect their confidentiality. Rose is a mother aged 17, with a daughter who is four months old. Currently, she and her daughter are living in a foster home and in about five months Rose will be turning 18 years old and will be "aged out" of the system. She, with deep anguish, imagines what her future has in store for her and her daughter: Uncertainty, fear, homelessness and vulnerable to all forms of risk. The reality of being "on

her own" with no prior daily skills, insufficient education, a substance abuse problem, no support networks, no job related skills, inadequate or no healthcare for herself and her baby, and no permanent housing is cause for real panic.

Rose focuses on her basic needs such as shelter and food, yet she has no real skills or knowledge about navigating the social systems that are there to help her through this difficult transition to adulthood. In her fears she turns to the way of life she knows best as her source of survival. Unfortunately, Rose has made the wrong choice; hers is a decision to be comfortable with mediocrity, which manifests denial; the result of her belief to raise an excellent child. For many young individuals who are emancipated from the system, this story and similar stories are repeated over and over again.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foster Care Dependents

Between 1983 and 2003, the number of U.S. children placed in foster care in the United States grew from 302,000 to 547,000. Incredibly, the rate of placement nearly doubled, from 4.7% per 1,000 children to 7.7%, which means that a higher number of children than ever before are spending time in foster care (Shirk & Stangler, 2004).

Children are generally placed in foster care for one reason: their protection. Those placed in care are most often victims of some form of neglect, including inadequate basic life necessities such as food, clothing, housing, and parental supervision. Other children suffer other kinds of maltreatment such as physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse, which can mark their lives forever. The majority of cases fall into the categories of parental failure, poverty, and ignorance. Alcohol, drug abuse, and other related factors all fall into this category.

Each year, between 18,500 and 25,000 teenagers are "aged out" of foster care because they reach the age in

which their legal right to foster care ends (Child Welfare Outcomes, 2000). Another 5,200 teenagers run away from foster care before they are formally "aged out". Generally, the teens who are "aged out" of foster care entered care as teenagers, although many have spent much of their lives in the system (Angene, Byrnes, Choca, Minoff, & Pearn, 2004).

Overview of Policy Development of Independent Living Programs

Independent Living Programs were created to assist those youth who are "aged out" of the foster care system, due to the identification of those difficulties that this population experiences after emancipation. These programs were developed for children who are unlikely be returned to their biological families or be adopted. Historically, the welfare system has done little to prepare these children for their lives on their own in the real world.

In 1983, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Office of Human Development Services issued a request for proposals entitled "Study of the Adaptations of Adolescents in Foster Care to Independence and Community Life". The proposals outlined a rationale for researching the topic of independent living and indicated that there was federal recognition of the need

for research in this area (Mech, 1994). It was during this year that the government realized with great concern that a serious problem existed.

After several studies, in 1986, legislation passed a federal independent living program through the addition of Section 477 to Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. This program was initiated as a result of concerns from human service professionals and members of the larger society. They recognized that a large number of adolescents who were released from the foster care system were once again returning to the care of the state as adults (Stone, 1987). The Independent Living Program (ILP) was created to facilitate welfare agencies to respond to the needs of youth emancipating from foster care. They assisted them as they prepared for independent living (U.S. DHHS, 1999).

Through this legislation a light of hope shined for the youth "aged out" from foster care. However, these changes were not enough, due to the limitations in services. The age of the participants was up to 18 years old, there were no funds for rooms along with other significant limitations that the Independent Living Programs confronted at that time.

The 1990s was a decade of significant amendments to the law that protects this population. More funds were

assigned and services were also improved. The state and local policies for child welfare services defined their specific services to be delivered and outlined standards to be met (Collins, 2001).

After recognizing that adolescents were having difficulties transitioning out of the foster care system by the age of 18, the Independent Living Program legislation was amended in 1990. The new legislation extended foster youth independent living services up to the age of 21, at the discretion of each state. This amendment recognized that adolescents in foster care often faced overwhelming difficulties when making an abrupt transition out of care at the age of 18 and that those services were more effective on a longer continuum (CWLA Testimony, 1999). A victory for the emancipated youth was prevailed; thanks in large part to this amendment, adult youth of today have the opportunity to continue with the emancipation services until 21 years old.

In 1993, the Independent Living Program was once again amended and permanently reauthorized as part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (CWLA Testimony, 1999). Cynthia Fagnoni, the Director of Human Services Division of the U.S. General Accounting office, testified at a hearing on foster care independent living, that the act

authorized federal funding of 70 million dollars per year for states to develop and implement services to assist youth aged 16 and over to make the transition to independent living from foster care.

The most recent progress in independent living services is the opening of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (Chafee Foster Care Independence Act, 2000), which amends Title IV-E to provide states with more funding and flexibility in carrying out programs designed to help the children make the transition from foster care to adulthood. This significant addendum to Title IV-E addresses the diverse needs of each state nation wide, allowing them to create programs that satisfy the requirements of each state.

This law authorized \$700 million over a 5-year period. States are allowed to design and implement their independent living programs based on their particular needs. This law allows the states to provide assistance to youth from age 18 to 21 years already emancipated, including money for room and board, and extending health insurance coverage until 21 years old.

Previous and recent studies (Collins, 2001) of independent living programs identify several limitations of the programs currently in use. For example, a small

number of programs provide reasonable vocational programs. The accessibility of transitional housing is extremely limited, and connections to potential employers are not thoroughly expanded. Also, the majority of the states help youth "aged out" with daily living skills and classroom activities while practical ways of applying the living skills necessary to keep independence(e.g., out field experiences, workshops and permanent connections with community resources) are uncommon.

These limitations clearly point out the need to create Independent Living Programs that can provide practical skills primarily in the area of education, housing, and employment for our foster youth. Foster youth need to have field experiences, workshops to practice their daily living skills and permanent connections with private and public agencies and/or companies, in order to acquire the right tools to face adulthood. Innovative Independent Living Programs are needed due to the fact that adequate self-sufficiency skills have not been provided to foster youth while in care. They need a secure place to live, a stable job to earn income to support themselves, and competency in daily living skills to face the responsibilities of adulthood (Collins, 2001).

Education

It appears that education is a critical factor involved in an adolescent's success. The most recent research (Collins, 2001) on youth about to "age out" of foster care found that they are more likely to have been held back a grade, to have been suspended or expelled from school compared to most other youth. At age seventeen, they read on average at a seventh grade level. Only little more than half of these have graduated from high school, compared with 85% of all youth aged eighteen to twenty-four years old (Shirk & Stangler, 2004).

Low education achievement has one of the most adverse effects on long-term adjustment. Many foster youth growing up in the system lag behind their peers academically. This occurs often due to multiple changes in placements which result in disruption in their educational progress. Mech (1994) suggests that possessing less than a high school diploma is a critical and perhaps an enormous barrier for youth who are working to achieve self-sufficiency.

According to Shirk and Stangler (2004), completion of a high school education and participation in higher education may be two of the strongest indicators of future ability to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency after discharge from the foster care system.

The result of the studies are consistent in their findings that youth "aged out" of the foster care system who are involved in after care programs have better outcomes than those who are not involved in such programs (Collins, 2001). These programs not only provide youth with the supportive services needed to obtain their education, but they also provide financial services to make it easy for youth to attend school.

A good education can yield many opportunities in the labor world. Youth with a higher education will have better job opportunities compared with those who have not completed their high school degree. Unfortunately, foster youth are typically poorly educated and perform below average, which adds a barrier when they seek employment.

Employment

George, Bilaver, Needell, Brookhart, and Jackman (2002) completed a major study on employment outcomes for youth "aged out" of foster care in three states: California, Illinois, and South Carolina. The study linked foster care databases in these three states. The research summarized that youth "aged out" of foster care are underemployed. Many youth leaving foster care are at a

higher risk of discrimination due to their age, insufficient education, and lack of job experience.

Barth (1990) conducted another study of 55 emancipated youth in the San Francisco Bay Area who had left the system in recent years. In terms of employment, Barth found the average annual income of his sample to be \$10,476. Also, only 51% of the participants reported paid vacations, 36% sick leave, and 44% health benefits. These results are particularly alarming when one considers that the majority of emancipated youth do not enjoy the benefit of having the safety net of a family who could help support them at anytime. In fact, 53% of respondents indicated serious money problems such as inability to pay bills or buy food, and 33% reported having engaged in illegal activities (including selling drugs, prostitution, and stealing for food) to meet their needs. Of the participants in Barth's (1990) study, 29% reported a lack of education and relevant job skills as the greatest barrier to finding better employment opportunities.

Many factors exist that contribute to foster care youth being left behind in the labor market. The lack of education and knowledge, little or no job experience, and emotional instability are some of the factors they carry when exiting the foster care system. A great number of

these young people who are "aged out" of foster care have trouble finding pathways into the workforce. Also, they often lack the documents necessary to establish eligibility for employment, such as social security cards or birth certificates. Add to this the frequent placement changes while in care which make it difficult for them to hold part-time employment.

A secure financial status offers individuals the opportunity to live in a stable place. Rent payments, bills, and food will be covered without problems. However, foster youth who have been emancipated face the challenge of maintaining a stable place to live due to their economic struggles.

Housing

Try to imagine living in California with earnings of \$13,000 per year. There is no way to rent even a single room in a shared home. This becomes another critical issue affecting youths in transition; that of homelessness. Drop by any homeless shelter in America and you'll meet people who left the care system and do not have any place to live and who have spent parts of their childhoods in foster care.

A study by the National Alliance for the Homeless (1996) found that a minimum of 9% of the adult homeless population had spent time in the foster care system, with reports in some cities running as high as 45% (Collins, 2001). Research by the Alliance to End Homelessness surveyed 21 homeless shelter organizations. Of the 1,134 homeless clients surveyed, 36.2% had a history of foster care (Roman & Wolfe, 1997).

Another study completed by the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (1991) reported that among the 200 homeless teens interviewed, 45% had been in foster care. According to Cook (1991) as many as 25% of youth leaving foster care suffer homelessness for at least one night two to four years after leaving care. During that period, less than half were employed and only 38% held a job for a year or more.

Although differences exist between the lengths of the above investigations, the percentage of youth who experienced homelessness after care was considerable. Research supports this declaration and paints a sober picture of homelessness among youth who are "aged out" from the foster care system.

One basic cause of this problem within this population is the high costs of housing around the

country. As housing costs increase faster than wages, foster care emancipated youth face formidable challenges in obtaining and keeping safe housing. The National Low Income Housing Coalition (2003) reported that an average hourly housing wage of \$15.00 is required to afford a two-bedroom unit at fair market rent. California, which has some of the nation's highest housing costs, requires an average wage of \$21.00 per hour, or \$44,000 annually (Angene, Byrnes, Minoff and Pearn, 2004). This amount is an unimaginable salary for the majority of emancipated foster youth. The need for youth leaving foster care to have training and access to jobs that pay a living wage with health care benefits cannot be overemphasized as a key way to address the housing challenges these people face.

Reviewing the Attempts to Address the Problem

Through the Welfare System the Independent Living Program (ILP) has been achieving significant changes throughout the 20 years of existence. During the 1980s and 1990s the Independent Living Program has experienced legislative amendments that have brought better services and more funds to meet the desired goal, i.e., to assist foster youth with their transition to adulthood. However,

shortcomings of foster youth transitional achievements continue to be an enormous concern for behavioral and social professionals.

Public and private agencies have joined their efforts to develop their particular Independent Living Programs including trainings, orientations and classes about how to live independently. However, this population continues to have struggles with their self-sufficiency. Why?

Collins (2001) referred to the lack of research studies that have been conducted focusing on Independent Living Programs' outcomes and efficacy. The implementation of research based-outcome measurements will facilitate the continued evaluation, creation and enhancement of independent living services to foster youth. Ultimately, it will help to support and empower foster youth towards successful adulthood as productive citizens, parents, and leaders.

Another area that has to be expanded is the implementation of individualized Independent Living plans and services for foster youth. The majority of the Independent Living Programs involves classroom-based activities and offers little or no opportunity to practice what they learned. Daily living skills need to be practiced in the field to obtain experience and knowledge.

The services should start at an early age in order to be more realistic, practical, goal-oriented, achievable, and strength-based.

It is imperative to develop statewide Independent Living core service standards, and train all program administrators, managers, and social workers in the effective distribution of Independent Living services to all qualified foster youth on a state wide and national level (Courtney and Associates, 2001). Each state has the freedom to create policies and programs according to their needs. However, each state should have a policy and standards core to guide and evaluate the services in the same level.

Finally, the program developers have to increase the ability to provide appropriate and effective Independent Living services by connecting and enhancing collaboration through training and joint service delivery efforts with public and private agencies. For example, Casey Family Programs is a program that has been working solely to help foster youth in their transition to adulthood. Foster youth need to step out of the classroom and put in practice what they learn. The greater part of the Independent Living Programs offers minimum connection with possible employers, schools, and vocational centers. Also

foster youth needs to get involved in daily activities such as food preparation, pay bills, money management, social relationships, and other necessary skills.

Erikson's Psychosocial Theory and Its Application to Foster Youth

The struggles of the youth "aged out" from foster care systems do not start when they turn 18 years of age. Most of these children have experienced disruptions in their development since early in life. Adolescents leaving foster care were deprived of their basic needs and were left behind at critical stages that cannot be retrieved, due to the inability of their parents or relatives to provide safe living conditions. Erik Erikson would suggest that these conditions of childhood may greatly impact foster youth's successful negotiation through his psychosocial model. The proposed "Getting Ready" Independent Living Program is based Erikson's theory of Psychosocial Development (Miller, 2002). This theory is briefly presented below.

The first five stages describe the phases that foster children have to complete to obtain appropriate development and the ability to become independent (Miller, 2002). Foster children are often characterized by difficulties in their social, emotional and physical

domains. The experiences that foster children experience in their dysfunctional home environment do not allow them to address these developmental stages satisfactorily.

According to Erikson's Theory, the first stage, infancy or oral-sensory stage is approximately the first year or year and a half of life. The task is to develop trust without completely eliminating the capacity of mistrust (Miller, 2002).

If caregivers can give the newborn a degree of familiarity, consistency, and continuity, then the child will develop the feeling that the world is a safe place to be; that people are reliable and loving. Through the caregivers' responses, the child also learns to trust his or her own body and the biological urges that go with it (Goldhaber, 2000).

If the caregivers are unreliable and inadequate or they reject the infant and harm her, the infant will develop mistrust. Also, if they turn away from the infant's needs to satisfy their own needs instead, the infant will be apprehensive and suspicious around people (Goldhaber, 2000).

The majority of foster children experience mistrust during their infancy. They often came to the system from parents with drug and alcohol abuse histories or parents

with marked problems of neglect that make them unable to fulfill the needs of their children. Foster Family Agency workers receive in their caseload children characterized by depression, paranoia, and psychosis history that develop from this life pattern.

The second stage is the anal-muscular stage of early childhood, from about 18 months to 3 or 4 years old. The task is to achieve a degree of autonomy while minimizing shame and doubt (Miller, 2002).

If caregivers (and the other care-takers that often come into the picture at this point) permit the child to explore and manipulate his or her environment, the child will develop a sense of autonomy or independence. The caregivers should not discourage the child, but neither should they push. A balance is required. People often advise new parents to be "firm but tolerant" at this stage and the advice is good. This way, the child will develop both self-control and self-esteem (Goldhaber, 2000). On the other hand, it is rather easy for the child to develop instead a sense of shame and doubt. If the caregivers come down hard on any attempt to explore and to be independent, the child will soon give up with the assumption that she or he cannot and should not act on their own (Goldhaber, 2000). It is important to keep in mind that even something

as innocent as laughing at the toddler's efforts can lead the child to feel deeply ashamed, and to doubt his or her abilities.

To some extent, the previous description addresses the question: Why are there many children diagnosed with ADHD/ADD? Foster children many times grow in a hostile environment, where there is minimal or no encouragement or attention afforded them. Sometimes, a social worker's caseload is complicated by foster children taking medication to control their impulsiveness that leads them in later childhood and even adulthood, to jump into things without proper consideration of their abilities.

Stage three is the genital-locomotor stage or play age. From 3 or 4 to 5 or 6, the task confronting every child is to learn initiative without too much guilt (Miller, 2002). Initiative means a positive response to the world's challenges, taking on responsibilities, learning new skills, feeling purposeful. Caregivers can encourage initiative by encouraging children to try out their ideas (Goldhaber, 2000). It is important to accept and encourage fantasy, curiosity, and imagination. This is a time for play, not for formal education. The child is now capable of imagining a future situation, one that

isn't a reality right now. Initiative is the attempt to make that non-reality a reality (Goldhaber, 2000).

Erikson includes the Oedipal experience in this stage. From his perspective, the Oedipal crisis involves the reluctance a child feels in abandoning his or her closeness to the opposite sex parent. A parent has the responsibility socially, to encourage the child to "grow up". But if this process is done too ruthlessly and too abruptly, the child learns to feel guilty about his or her feelings (Miller, 2002). If the child experiences too much initiative and too little guilt, he or she can become ruthless. The ruthless person takes initiative; they make their plans, whether it's related to school, romance, politics or career. It's just that they don't care who they step on to achieve their goals. The goals are everything, and guilty feelings are for the weak (Goldhaber, 2000).

Ruthlessness is bad, however harder on the person if she or he has too much guilt, it's what Erikson calls inhibition. The inhibited person will not try things because he or she thinks of himself or herself to be incapable of completing a particular task. On the sexual, Oedipal side, the inhibited person may be impotent or frigid (Goldhaber, 2000).

A perfect balance leads to the psychosocial strength of purpose. A sense of purpose is something that many foster children crave in their lives, due to the instability and lack of balance between initiative and guilt that they suffered during this stage. Many foster youth that have been in the system lack courage to make proper decisions.

Stage four is the latency stage or the school-age child from about 6 to 12 years old. The task is to develop a capacity for industry while avoiding an excessive sense of inferiority. Children must dedicate themselves to education and to learning the social skills that their society requires them to learn (Miller, 2002).

Caregivers and other family members are joined by teachers and peers and other members of the community at large. They all contribute: caregivers must encourage, teachers must concern, peers must accept. Children must learn that there is pleasure not only in conceiving a plan, but in carrying it out. They must learn the feeling of success, whether it is in school, on the playground, academic or social (Goldhaber, 2000).

If the child is allowed little success, because of insensitive teachers or rejecting peers, then he or she will develop instead a sense of inferiority or

incompetence. Additional sources of inferiority Erikson mentions includes racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination (Miller, 2002).

If the child is exposed to too much industry, it will lead to the state that Erikson called "narrow virtuosity". This refers to those children who aren't allowed to "be children," the ones who parents or teachers push into one area of competence without allowing the development of broader interests. These are the kids without a life: child actors, athletes, musicians, or child prodigies of all sorts (Goldhaber, 2000). But a harder and more common state than narrow virtuosity is the state of inertia. The inferiority complex emerges when at first the child doesn't succeed in a task and parents, teachers or peers do not encourage the child to try again. Instead they take advantage of this situation to humiliate and discourage the child. Others never developed social skills so they never go out in public and become inert (Miller, 2002).

The majority of the foster children came to the system with a marked inferiority complex. The emotional and mental trauma that they experienced turns them into vulnerable and shy individuals. These behaviors interfered with their social development and interactions, school

performance, and mental health; issues that will become barriers when they become adults.

Stage five is adolescence, beginning with puberty and ending around 18 or 20 years old. The task during adolescence is to achieve ego identity and avoid role confusion. Ego identity means knowing who you are and how you fit into the rest of society. It requires that you take all you've learned about life and yourself and mold it into a unified self-image. This self-image has to be one that your community finds meaningful (Miller, 2002).

Society should provide clear "rites of passage", i.e., certain accomplishments and ceremonies that help to distinguish the adult from the child. Boys and girls may be required to go through certain tests of endurance, symbolic observance, or educational events. The society implement the distinction between the powerless time of childhood and the powerful and responsible time of adulthood, is made clear (Goldhaber, 2000).

Without these things, we are likely to see role confusion, meaning an uncertainty about one's place in society and the world. When an adolescent is confronted by role confusion, Erikson said that the individual is suffering from an identity crisis (Miller, 2002). In fact,

a common question adolescents in our society ask is a straight-forward question of identity: "Who am I?"

Where a person is so involved in a particular role, in a particular society or subculture there is no room left for tolerance. Erikson called this maladaptive tendency fanaticism. A fanatic believes that his way is the only way (Goldhaber, 2000). Adolescents are known for their idealism and for their tendency to see things in black-and-white. This population will gather others around them and promote their beliefs and life-styles without regard to others' rights to disagree (Goldhaber, 2000).

The lack of identity is perhaps more difficult still, and Erikson called this phenomenon repudiation. They repudiate their membership in the world of adults and, even more, so they repudiate their need for an identity (Miller, 2002). Some adolescents allow themselves to join with a group, especially the kind of group that is particularly ready to provide the details of your identity: religious cults, militaristic organizations, groups founded on odium, groups that have divorced themselves from the painful demands of normal society. They may become involved in destructive activities, drugs or alcohol, and may withdraw into their own psychotic fantasies.

Foster youth who are not prepared to face adulthood may become involved in these destructive activities. There exists a significant number of foster youth that have involved themselves in criminal behaviors. As a result, they end up spending part of their youth in the Juvenile Hall or find themselves incarcerated at a later time. Some become part of street gangs or extremist groups. Foster youth who are "aged out" from the care system need the skills and strategies to negotiate through these challenges. Most foster adolescents have not found their place in this world due to the terrible tragedies that they have experienced during relatively short lives.

"Getting Ready"-Independent Living program will help foster youth to find their place in society in a way that supports and reflects positive attainments of Erikson's psychosocial stages. This place will allow them to contribute with their abilities and talents. Foster youth need innovative Independent Living Programs that guide them towards fitting into this world and permit them to be able to live by society's standards despite their imperfections and incompleteness.

CHAPTER THREE

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Description

After reviewing the literature, it appears that youth leaving the foster care system suffer great obstacles in a variety of areas when transitioning into adult life. Some of the most difficult problems they face are poor education, homelessness, and unemployment. The importance of preparing the youth for the transition from care cannot be overstated. The program's challenge is to provide young people in foster care with not just "book learning" but opportunities to practice life skills.

Program Goal

The proposed program is entitled "Getting Ready"-Independent Living Program. This pilot program was designed to provide practical independent living skills and to improve the acquisition of knowledge, and encourage positive attitudes and behavior toward responsible adulthood for youth ages 14 to 19 that will be emancipating from foster care. There is a necessity for this population for realistic social support, educational and vocational opportunities, as well as the development of employment and daily living skills. These are crucial

in order to address a turn around in their choices and movement towards responsible citizens.

The successful development and implementation of this program will improve the stability of the youth in foster care. It is expected that these services will reduce the number of youth who collapse into dysfunctional patterns such as homelessness, unemployment, criminal behavior, mental health problems and others.

This overall goal will be achieved through direct assistance from San Bernardino County Department of Children's Services, Independent Living Skills Program as well as partnerships with non-profit organizations, local community colleges, universities, and businesses dedicated to improving the opportunities for youth in our foster care system and youth who are emancipated.

Program Objectives

This program will recruit individuals through the various foster family agencies in the San Bernardino area as well as through referrals from the San Bernardino County Independent Living Skills Programs. The program will train 40 foster youth through the implementation of a complete curriculum on self-sufficiency skills with the opportunity to put them into practice. The training will

occur over a 12-week period. A three hours session will be provided once a week during the program for a total of 36 hours. The training will consist of interactive group sessions, workshops, presentations from professionals in the community, and field trips. Also, the program will include a mentoring program for the participant after their training completion. The program will provide both guidance and practical experience to youth on how to evaluate, modify, and enhance their skills for future success.

"Getting Ready" personnel are aware of the critical traumas that foster children have experienced. For that reason, this program will begin by working with the "core" of the problem by building a foundation of assets that encourage youth to learn new behaviors and skills through the training. It is important to understand that, before teaching independent living skills to youth, we must address and process the feelings of grief and loss that have manifested as problems within the lives of these foster youth.

Upon enrolling into Program "Getting Ready", an initial assessment will be completed to identify the needs of the participants. This will aid in gathering, evaluating, and documenting information relevant to the

development of each youth within the psycho-social, emotional, and educational domains. A realistic appraisal can then be made as to the unique services each minor requires.

An assessment of these domains is crucial in determining the readiness of each of the youth for emancipation. The following comprises the assessment:

1. Basic academic skills and school performance
2. Career goals
3. Daily livings skills (e.g. money management, nutrition, hygiene)
4. Survival skills (using preventive medical care, avoiding drugs and alcohol)
5. Interpersonal skills and social development,
6. Mental Health.

The same survey will likewise be used to provide a final assessment of the youth upon the completion (after 12 weeks) of the program. The assessment will help to establish what each youth has learned before and after completion of the program and help to evaluate outcome indicators and measure progress for reporting purposes.

Narrative Description of Services

The training will cover three major areas and a guidebook defining the content will be distributed to each participant. The first area is intended to address the "core" problem. During sessions 1 and 2 the trainers will be working on the internal healing process with participants. Presenters from various Mental Health Programs will give presentations on how to obtain a sense of worth as a person, know how to use the support systems available to them, how to express constructive curiosity and exploratory behaviors, on becoming an ethical person, and other related themes. Also, the participants will develop an Emancipation Plan based on their current knowledge and where they will manifest their current goals.

During sessions 3 to 11 the participants will be trained extensively on how to acquire the following skills: Making successful choices while minimizing potential consequences, becoming socially and interpersonally adept, choosing the best educational and career paths, along with job interviewing instruction and other vital skills. These will prepare them to face the responsibilities of adulthood as well as be able to function in society without the need of any public

assistance. During session 12, final session, participants are given their completed individual plan, and will participate in a graduation ceremony.

The domains that will be covered will have specific learning goals, expectations and activities. They will also cover skills acquisition and outcomes associated with each section presented during training goal, and outcomes for each life skill presented during the training. Finally, they will address Erikson's psychosocial stage development as appropriate. The following explanation will show the detailed Plan of Program Activities by sessions:

Week 1: During Session I the trainers will offer the orientation of "Getting Ready" ILP rules, guidelines and format of the program to each youth for review and signature of programs goals. This also will serve to introduce each participant to their classmates and help identify goals, values and objectives for their plan. Participants will also develop their individual emancipation plan.

The last part of this session will be conducted by a mental health professional that will discuss with the participant the impairments that could destroy their motivation, the ability to succeed in the school and jobs, and damage their personal relationships.

Week 2: Session II will be a continuation of Session I. This session will continue to address the internal healing process of the foster youth. The trainers will include a spiritual section, which is an important life component. The foster parent integration begins here. They will be engage to actively participate and cooperate with the foster youth training. Foster youth will require the foster parents support to develop the grade of familiarity, consistency and continuity that they need to feel trust in them.

The mental health professional will give a presentation about behaviors and choices that can be life altering. The last part of this session will be a panel composed of individuals who have spent some time in foster care and were able to succeed. The panelists will share their own experiences and will encourage the participants to get ready for a better life. Also, they will be part of the mentoring program after training completion.

Week 3: During Session III the trainers will give presentations and conduct workshops concerning the acquisition of daily living skills. The trainers will prepare participants on how to maintain good hygiene, understanding ways to stay healthy, knowing how to care for their illnesses, know about medical and dental

resources. Also, they will prepare them on how to clean a house and wash clothes, knowing the importance of home safety, knowing how to seek help in case of emergency, learn how to independently travel, learn how to file taxes, pay bills, understand their rights, and knowing how to access community services. The foster parents of those who participate will be invited to attend and interact during this session. Foster parents will encourage and allow foster youth to practice what they learned without destructive and discourage prompts. They will motivate foster youth to try their new skills at home. Through these experiences participant will develop self-control and self-esteem consistent with Erikson's psychosocial theory.

Week 4: In Session IV a presenter from a bank or credit union institution will orient and teach participants about how to open a saving account, develop a saving plan, understand the importance of a credit history, know how to apply for a loan, and develop a daily budget along with an outline on how to keep track of daily expenditures. An identified volunteer will open an account during this session and will be taught how to manage it as a workshop.

The trainers will also prepare participants on how to obtain their birth certificates and social security numbers, and know how to obtain a drivers license or identification card. The trainers will give participants the assignment to obtain these important documents before the graduation ceremony, as well as to open a savings account. Foster parents, county social workers and foster care social worker will assist towards fulfilling these tasks and in this process address some of the psychosocial tasks that Erikson suggests that individuals must negotiate. Therefore, it is important that foster parents and staff reinforce participants' initiative in this process. As a team, we can encourage initiative by encouraging youth to try out their ideas. However, it is also important to set limits and rules to avoid or decrease ruthlessness on the part of foster youth, and instead help them develop a growing sense of independence and industriousness.

Week 5: During Session V a presenter from the Employment Development Department will offer orientation on preparing participants to be able to identify careers of interest, make an informed career decision, and developing a career plan. Also, they will prepare them to identify and find temporary jobs in the community,

complete a job application, complete a resume and cover letter, interview for job, follow-up after job interview, and understand employee wage deductions, benefits and rights.

Also, there will be a workshop on how to apply and dress for employment interviews. Youth will be given an application to fill out and then receive constructive feedback. Trainers and participants will role-play a mock job interview. A videotape of the exercise will be conducted and used afterwards as a learning tool for further teaching and positive critiquing. Trainers will instruct participants to create their resumes for the next session as well as the cover letters for each participant's resume. Foster parents and staff will allow youth to make proper decisions with the appropriate assistance. Foster youth needs to experience the feeling of success whether in the school, home or in the job sceneries. In this way, they will be developing a sense of trust and a healthy identity as suggested by Erikson.

Week 6: During this Session VI, the participants will learn effective study skills, how to obtain school records, identify post high school jobs, career, academic options, and identify educational resources. Participants

will learn how to apply for school loans and for post high school education.

The foster youths will be taken on a field trip to San Bernardino Valley College, where a faculty or staff member will give them a campus tour. Participants will receive an orientation regarding admission requirements, financial aide, housing, how to interpret ACT and SAT scores and detailed plan for sophomores and juniors preparing themselves for college. Also, youth will receive an intensive presentation on various majors that the institution offers in the campus.

Dinner will be provided at a local restaurant. This component will enable participants to practice the appropriate behaviors in public and social settings.

Week 7: Session VII will prepare the participants on how to obtain a stable place to live. They will learn how to understand home buying, renting, how to search for housing, and how to fill a lease agreement. Literature such as the apartment guides, classified, along with apartments and rooms for rent will be used to teach the youth how to obtain a place to live.

Participants will actually go on a field trip to an apartment complex and be given a guided tour. The complex

manager will explain the qualifications needed to rent an apartment.

Week 8: In Session VIII interpersonal social skills as well as survival skills will be addressed. The participants will come to understand and recognize verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. They will be instructed how to understand the importance of feedback, the correct way to introduce one self to others along with proper telephone etiquette.

Also during this session trainers will prepare participants on how to acquire methods for continued personal development, cultural awareness, effective problem solving skills, anger management and techniques. Participants will be instructed on what is required to develop and maintain healthy relationships. The youth will participate in another role-play exercise which shall be videotaped for review and constructive critiquing.

Week 9: Session IX will provide instruction towards developing personal skills in the areas of self-esteem, individual choices, and effectively dealing with consequences. The participants will learn about the dangers associated with alcohol, drugs, and tobacco. They will receive sex education, instruction concerning sexually transmitted diseases, along with how to handle

peer pressure. Participants will also receive basic nutritional guidance relevant to developing healthy eating habits. Foster parents and staff will motivate participants to clarify concerns about the above topic with reject their beliefs and values. Through this process foster youth will feel secure to make the appropriate decision and feel the protection of their environment.

A presenter from the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) will offer orientation to the foster youth regarding the consequences of being involved with illegal drugs activities. Trainers will also, discuss the definition of self-esteem and will instruct participants to write a presentation regarding the value of having a healthy view of one's self.

Week 10: A professional computer programmer will offer an intensive computer and internet skills class for Session X. The participants will learn how to use the basic functions of the computer, how to use the internet for communication, techniques searching the web, how to email and perform word processing functions.

Week 11: The trainers will have a jobs, educational and community services fair for Session XI. Guests from private and public companies interested in helping foster youth, such as fast food restaurants, Job Corps, and Armed

Forces, will provide the participants with the opportunity to complete applications and provide orientation. In addition, private and public college representatives will have a display in our facility to bring the participants some further resources for continuing education.

During this session the participants will be assigned to a mentoring program. The mentoring program will be sponsored by the agencies and companies participating in the fair. Mentors will support and provide follow up to the participant for at least 4 years after the training completion. In addition to providing emotional support and feedback regarding the youth's plans, they will help foster youth pursue school grants, employments, affordable housing, and other community resources.

Week 12: Session XII is the final session of the training. During this session, participants will fill out the post assessment survey. During this final session, those who participated will complete the staff and program process evaluations. Foster youths will complete their Emancipation Individual Plan that they began during the first session.

Finally, participants will have a Graduation Ceremony during which they will receive a certificate of completion.

Staff Composition

"Getting Ready" will utilize three Independent Living Skills Assistant Trainers to teach the 12 sessions and to help with adult supervision. Other staff, such as Director, Quality Assurance Specialist, and Recruitment/Placement Officer will be on-site, helping to supervise the youth. The Assistance Trainers and the Recruitment/Placement staff will also work directly with County Social Workers and Foster Care Social Workers with referrals into the program. In addition to the Assistant Trainers, a Quality Assurance Specialist Officer will be hired for tracking program outcomes, ensuring that the program is implemented with fidelity, and completing required reports.

Training Sessions for Participants

"Getting Ready" Program's training process will occur over a twelve-week time period. A three-hour session will be provided once a week, for 12 weeks and, for a total of 36 hours of foster youth training. Each training session will occur on a quarterly basis, totaling four sessions in a year. Each quarter is expected to serve approximately 40 youth, ages 15-19, recruited from Foster Family Agencies, and referrals from the County. Training sessions will be

scheduled in the late afternoon to accommodate the schedules of participants who are enrolled in school.

Training Location

"Getting Ready" -ILP will rent an office location to use as the training facility. The location will have enough space and will be comfortable so the participants can have an appropriate learning environment. The program will approve the onsite training location through the County prior to implementing program activities.

Meals/Snacks

Since training will be provided after school hours, Program "Getting Ready" will provide meals and/or snacks to all participants according to the time the session commences.

Incentive Payments

Attendance sheets of each group will be submitted to the county will include the participant's name, date of the class, class title, and attendance record for each student. Incentive payments will be disbursed through the county.

Budget

A cost of approximately \$300,000 will cover the program costs for one year. Salaries, benefits, and operation expenses will be provided from this budget. This proposal will be submitted to the San Bernardino County Government. Each state receives federal funding through the Title IV-E to create strategies for the youth in transition from foster care.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Sampling

The sample for this project consists of a focus group of ten professionals skilled in foster care system from the San Bernardino County area. In order to participate in this project, it was required the minimum age of 18 years old, and must be working with the foster care system. The group requirements were selected because this group has the expertise to obtain an objective and valid feedback regarding the implementation of "Getting Ready" Independent Living Program.

Data Collection and Instrument

Data for this descriptive and qualitative project were collected utilizing a structured questionnaire. The instrument was designed to obtain reactions regarding "Getting Ready" Independent Living Program implementation. Professionals related to the foster care system were contacted by phone and/or face to face and were provided with an explanation of the nature of this project. The questionnaire acquired data concerning three areas of focus. First Section addressed demographic information including gender, current work place, occupation, and

years of work experience. Section II addressed participants' feedback regarding "Getting Ready" Independent Living Program viability, possible implementation and sensibility to the needs of the foster youth in transition. This information was acquired through 11 questions organized by scale. In the final section, two open-ended qualitative questions were geared to identify programs' strengths, weakness, as well suggestions from the professionals to improve this pilot program.

Procedure

The student researcher began by identifying the sample group. Participants were selected from foster family agencies, the Department of Children and Social Services, and independent living program coordinators in the San Bernardino area. Agency social workers, county social workers, and independent living program coordinators were contacted by phone and/or face to face in their work settings. The student researcher explained to the participants the nature of the project. A packet was distributed to each participant for appropriate completion. Packets contained informed consent forms, a program summary, and a questionnaire. Participants were

contacted after five days to collect the completed packets.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The project research sample consisted in a focus group of ten professionals related to the foster care system. Table 1 shows their demographic characteristics.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender (n = 10)		
Male	3	30.0%
Female	7	70.0%
Employment Status		
Employed	10	100.0%
Unemployed	0	0.0%
Place of work		
Foster Family Agency	7	70.0%
Department of Children and Social Services	3	30.0%
Occupation		
Agency social worker	5	50.0%
County social worker	1	10.0%
FFA Administrator	2	20.0%
ILP Coordinator	2	20.0%
Years of work experience		
0 to 5	7	70.0%
10 to 15	3	30.0%
15 or more	0	0.0%

The participants should be of a minimum age of 18 years old. This group of participants was composed by seven females and three males. Seven of the ten participants work for a foster family agency (FFA) and three for the Department of Children and Social Services (DCSS). Five of the participants were agency social workers, two FFA administrators, one county social worker and two independent living program coordinators.

Seventy percent of the professionals had work experience range between zeros to five years, related with the foster care system. Thirty percent had ten to fifteen years of work experience related with this field.

Professional Reactions Regarding the Program

The second section of the questionnaire focused on the program's viability, implementation, and how sensible the program is to the foster youth's needs. After the participants read the program summary they responded to eleven questions about the content. Table 2 shows the professional's feedback responses regarding the program description.

The first question asked if the program will provide foster youths with guidance to handle personal life situations. Seventy percent of the participants agreed and

30% strongly agreed. The second question asked if the program will be a support system while foster youth are preparing for adulthood. Eighty percent of the participants strongly agreed and 20% agreed. The next statement declared that the program will offer foster youth the necessary tools to gain self-sufficiency. Sixty percent of the respondents agreed, 30% strongly agreed, and 10% percent disagreed.

Regarding the fact if the program includes enough practical activities and learning experiences for the participants in order to reach their independency, the result was 70% of the participants agreed, 20% disagreed, and 10% strongly agreed. The next statement declared that the program seems sensitive to the foster youths needs, and 70% of the participants strongly agreed and 30% agreed.

In terms of whether the program has viability to be implemented immediately and its goals appear reachable, the result was 50% of the respondents strongly agreed, 40% agreed, and 10% disagreed. The next affirmation stated that the program includes one-on-one training which will help foster youths to reach their personal goals. Ninety percent of the participants agreed and 10% were strongly agreed.

In regards if the program needs to be longer, 60% of the respondents disagreed, 30% strongly agreed and 10% agreed. The next statement declared that the program seems worthwhile and offers innovated activities that will prepare foster youths with their transition to adulthood. The result was 60% of the participants agreed, 30% strongly agreed, and 10% disagreed.

Table 2. Respondents' Feedback to "Getting Ready"
Independent Living Program

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Program will provide personal guidance (n = 10)		
Strongly agree	3	30.0%
Agree	7	70.0%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Strongly disagree	0	0.0%
Program will be a support system		
Strongly agree	8	80.0%
Agree	2	20.0%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%
Program will provide Tools for self-sufficiency		
Strongly agree	3	30.0%
Agree	6	60.0%
Disagree	1	10.0%
Strongly disagree	0	0.0%

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Program includes practical learning activities		
Strongly agree	1	10.0%
Agree	7	70.0%
Disagree	2	20.0%
Strongly disagree	0	0.0%
Program seems sensitive to foster youth needs		
Strongly agree	7	70.0%
Agree	3	30.0%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Strongly agree	0	0.0%
Program can be implemented		
Strongly agree	5	50.0%
Agree	4	40.0%
Disagree	1	10.0%
Strongly disagree	0	0.0%
Program will provide one-on-one training		
Strongly agree	1	10.0%
Agree	9	90.0%
Disagree	0	0.0%
Strongly disagree	0	0.0%
Program needs to be longer		
Strongly agree	3	30.0%
Agree	1	10.0%
Disagree	6	60.0%
Strongly disagree	0	0.0%
Program will be worthwhile for foster youth life		
Strongly agree	3	30.0%
Agree	6	60.0%
Disagree	1	10.0%
Strongly agree	0	0.0%

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Foster youth will feel prepared to live independently		
Strongly agree	0	0.0%
Agree	7	70.0%
Disagree	2	20.0%
Strongly disagree	1	10.0%
Program will help foster youth to develop community resources		
Strongly agree	5	50.0%
Agree	3	30.0%
Disagree	1	10.0%
Strongly disagree	0	0.0%

Regarding the question of whether foster youths will feel prepared to live independently after graduating from the program, 70% of the respondents agreed, and 20% disagreed. Ten percent strongly agreed. Regarding the last declaration which stated that the program will help foster youths to develop support from resources within their community, 50% of the participants strongly agreed. Thirty percent agreed, and 10% disagreed.

Qualitative Data

In section III two open-ended questions were included in the survey (see question A and B in Appendix B) to obtain feedback of the program strengths and also suggestions to expand it. The answers to these questions

will help to enlarge "Getting Ready" Independent Living Program, as well to improve the areas that seem weak. The professionals' free opinions and suggestions regarding the program content are extremely helpful for the future of the program implementation.

The respondent's answers pointed out that connections with community resources and the outside practical activities are program strengths. For example, one respondent stated that, "The idea of having the community at large, such as business representatives, financial institutions, etc. is excellent. It will demonstrate to the young participant that there are people willing and able to help them as long as they are serious about getting ahead." Another positive response from professionals focused on involving foster parents in the training. For example, one respondent stated that, "Foster parents will be a good tool in this program to prepare the foster youth to model and practice these learned sessions at home for a successful transition to adulthood". The program developer understands that foster parent engagement in foster youth transitional process is fundamental. They are the primary resource to guide them to reach their goals and also, to allow foster youth practice the daily living skills learned.

The respondents also voiced pleasure at the money management training. Professionals in this field recognize the needs that foster youth have to be taught on how to manage their money. Foster parents play an important role in this area, because they have to provide foster children with allowance every month. The program will extensively train them in this area and foster parent will help them in managing the money every months. Another section that the respondents found meaningful was the mental health component where participants will address their loss and grief process and will participate in a support group to deal with their feelings. One of the respondents suggested that, "the mental health specialist should assess the participants' individual goals. How realistic they are, how they plan to achieve them, and what are the tools that they would need to obtain those goals".

The group of professionals also made suggestions through the open-ended questions to enlarge and improve the "Getting Ready" Program. Several of them suggested that the program should include tutoring and mentoring for those participants that have struggles with essential educational skills. One of the respondents stated "more emphasis should be channeled to assist foster youth in the area of reading and math skills; two essential academic

subjects critical to any one if he or she is to succeed in our highly competitive society. The program developer will take this idea into consideration to improve this fundamental area by including time to address foster youth's educational struggles.

According to the professionals' expertise another area that needs to be enlarged is to have less instruction time and develop more daily skills practicing activities. Have additional practical and useable daily skills are the main purpose of this pilot project. Therefore the developer of this project will revise the instructional time versus the practicing time to formulate changes in this area. Also the program will consider developing more outside experiences as well as more daily skills practicing time.

Another suggestion from the respondents was to have a longer program. One professional stated "the program needs to be longer, spending a few weeks with children that have had to deal with emotional and /or physical abuse is just not enough time. We need to start preparing these kids for independency at a much younger age". The program developer agreed with this suggestion and will review the program duration.

Finally, another issue that the professionals suggested was to have longer involvement of the mental health professionals. "The program needs to expand this session due to the traumatic experience that these children have experienced" a respondent stated. It was suggested to have the mental health specialist assess the participants' individual goals, and have a session where the participants discuss their expectations, concerns, and new goals. The program can expand this area and have more time where the mental health professional includes diverse areas of intervention. The program developer is awarded about the painful foster children had lived and their staff will be qualified to intervene with this population adequately.

Discussion

The purpose of this program is to offer a further resource to the foster youths who are "aged out" of the foster care system. This pilot program will help ease the transition from dependence to an independent adulthood. Preparing this population to become responsible citizens is an urgent need that exists in this society. It is not enough to provide independent living skills as a learning model simply to be complied with; rather, we have the

human responsibility to prepare foster youth to receive the skills and training necessary to engage them in healthy lifestyles.

The Program "Getting Ready" is unique in that staff will help market the skills of each youth by collaborating with foster parents, and local businesses to provide "real world" life experiences for the youth to practice their newly learned skills. After the training foster youth who have completed the program's requirements will have the tools to face adulthood responsibilities in a healthier manner.

Previously, it was mentioned that foster youth face difficulties maintaining a job for a considerable amount of time and their rate of job acquisition is rather poor. It is hoped that once the foster youth completes the training, they will be able to identify several career or job objectives, identify several employment resources, apply for employment, interview for employment, understand basic new hire information, and maintain employment.

Ongoing education is another area that foster youth find difficulties during the transition to adulthood. Participants of "Getting Ready" Independent Living Program will learn to understand that influences of one's ability to study, plan a study schedule and goals, utilize

effective study techniques, access resources to improve educational outcomes, and identify one's learning style.

Daily living skills are essential towards maintaining a stable place to live. This program expects that after completing the 12 training sessions, each participant will be able to access community resources, use public transportation, obtain personal documents, open a checking/savings account, and obtain credit. Also they will be able to acquire affordable housing, maintain their living situation, develop a budget, eat healthy, and fill out important legal documents for personal use.

Foster youths need to improve their social behaviors and build strong personalities as part of their success. "Getting Ready" Independent Living Program will expect their participants to learn how to identify their own communication strengths and weaknesses. They will identify situations that make them angry, set boundaries, and develop appropriate relationships. Foster youth will interact appropriately in public and social settings; and will be able to identify their own needs in resolving issues with family, caretakers, as well emancipation and independent living issues. Also foster youths will be able to be active listeners, recognize diverse cultures and

their elements of communication, and be able to use email, phones, and cell phones.

This project had a group of ten professionals related with the foster care system reacting about "Getting Ready"- Independent Living Program. After reading the program summary description the focus group assessed the content, gave suggestions and ideas to improve the program. While analyzing the data, it became clear that "Getting Ready" Independent Living Program had demonstrated significant possibilities to be immediately implemented. According to the professionals' feedback this program will have success in preparing foster youth to face adulthood. Have the foster youth experiencing with real daily activities give them the opportunity to grow in several areas.

Based on the results, it appears that the program will provide foster youth with guidance when they need to handle life situations. The program will training intensively in daily skills necessary to survive as an independent adult. Seventy percent of the respondents agreed with this affirmation. In regarding to the fact that the program will be a support system while foster youth are preparing for adulthood, the 80% of the professionals strongly agree. Foster youth will have

support from the program staff, foster parents, county and agency workers, mentors and other identified resources. This group will work as a team to prepare foster youth to face adulthood responsibly.

In terms of the program including enough practical activities and learning experiences for the participants to reach their independency, the 70% of the respondents agreed with this premise. The base of "Getting Ready" Independent Living Program is to have diverse activities in the field to provide participant real experiences. Also, most of the respondents strongly agreed (70%) that the program seems sensitive to the foster youth needs. The program developer took in consideration the struggles and difficulties that this population has to face when they become "age out" from the foster care system. For more than four years the program developer has been experiencing with this population's needs.

In regards to the program including one-on-one training to help foster youth to reach their personal goals, the 90% of the professionals agreed. The team composed by the program staff, foster parents, county and agency workers and the mentors will be a one-on-one net that will help participant to reach their goals. Ten percent of respondents agreed and 90% strongly agreed

regarding to the program seems worthwhile and offers innovates activities to prepare foster youth with their transition to adulthood. As mentioned before, one limitation that the most of the current Independent Living programs have is the lack of practical activities to prepare foster youth for adulthood. "Getting Ready" Program is mainly composed by innovated activities to help foster youth with the transition to adulthood.

It appears that "Getting Ready" Independent Living Program will help foster youth to develop support from resources within their community. Fifty percent of the respondents strongly agreed and the 40% agreed with this declaration. The mentoring program will be their strongest connection with the community resources that this population needs. This program will give foster youth follow up for at least four years after the training completion. Furthermore, the program will offer foster youth the necessary tools that they need to gain self-sufficiency. The majority of the experts agreed (60%) or strongly agreed (30%) with this affirmation. Foster youth will obtain vast tools in all their domains; mainly focuses in the areas of education, housing, employment, and daily living skills. Seventy percent of the respondents agreed that when foster youth graduate from

the program they will feel prepared to live independently. However there were significant 30 % percent of the professional that disagree with this premise. "Live independently" for this population is a difficult process and probably some of them will need an intensive training help process to acquire their independency. "Getting Ready" Program is aware of this possible situation. The program professional staff will have the expertise to identify participant with special needs and will refers them to the existence resources for appropriate help.

One significant finding was the opinions regarding the program need to be longer. Thirty percent of the participant strongly agreed with this particular issue; 10% agreed and 60% disagreed. After analyzing the results of this specific declaration the program developer will reevaluate the program duration. "Getting Ready" will add the necessary sessions to address the educational assistance, expand the mental health area and incorporate more outside activities.

Based on the professionals' reactions and the overall results, it appears that "Getting Ready" Independent Living Program has the viability to be implemented and its goals seem reachable. According to the experts in this field foster youth in transition to adulthood will benefit

from the completion of this program. The discussed results also reveal the need of research in the existing foster youth transition programs; as well as the need to improve the current independent living services.

Recent studies (Collins, 2001; Cook, 1991; Shirk & Stangler, 2004) examine foster youths' perspectives on services and provide information on specific program components that are viewed as helpful and not helpful. These findings suggest interventions that provide longer and more flexible periods of support in the areas of education and housing. However, due to the limited amount of information available, further research in this area should be a priority. Perhaps the initial focus should be on a substantial assessment of the new resources and improvements of independent living services set in the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999.

Collins (2001) also suggested that using larger samples, multiple methods, standardized measures, comparison groups, and sufficient follow-up would provide critical information for further planning. Important attention is also needed to document the implementation of services in order to use evaluation information for further policy and program improvements. Research and evaluation studies will provide program administrator,

policy makers, and services providers with the needed information to evaluate program effectiveness.

The Jim Casey Youth Initiative was the major inspiration to develop "Getting Ready" Independent Living Program. This initiative is a national effort to help young people make successful transitions from foster care to adulthood. Jim Casey Youth Opportunities helps foster youth to make the connections they need in education, employment, health care, housing, and supportive personal and community relationships (Casey Family Program, 2000). This initiative is an example of a successful program that helps foster youth with the transition to adulthood. However, a Casey Family Program is not available in each community. It is our responsibility to create and implement Independent Living Program that prepares this population to face the "adult world" on their own.

Limitations

A limitation of this project included the predominance of female subjects. Seventy percent of the sample were females and 30% males. Another limitation in this project was the small sample size. Due to the small number of respondents the student researcher is unable to generalize the findings.

In regard to the program, a considerable challenge will be committed the foster youth's participation and engage them in this process. It is important to understand that this is a difficult process, due to the tension between the adult and legal responsibility for youth safety and the desire of almost all youth to have control over their lives. Another challenge will be committing and engaging private and public agencies to help this population without any particular interest beside their emancipation process.

Future Research and Recommendations

Even though information acquired from adolescents participating in the program is valuable, true measurement of the actual effectiveness of the program cannot be accurately measured until the program is implemented and completed. The future outcome of these participants can only be measured after they reached "aged out" of the foster care system and assume their status as adults. These types of longitudinal studies are limited at this time. A proper recommendation for future research is to submit ex participants of Independent living Program like "Getting Ready" and compare outcomes with the "traditional" Independent Living Programs. These

particular studies will help us to obtain precise data to develop improved programs for foster youth in transition to adulthood. Also, longitudinal studies in this are needed, even though they will be costly and time consuming, but beneficial for future program developments. Using longitudinal studies will lead to accurate findings. Follow the participants through a long term in foster care is imperative, because we will be able to analyze their achievements through their adulthood.

Conclusion

For many youth in foster care, the lack of control over even minor aspects of their lives creates a dependency on others that disenables them after they are "aged out" of the foster care system. They have had little opportunity to make decisions about their lives, with the court and social workers deciding where and with whom they will live or foster parents making decisions about practically everything else. Failing to involve youth in making decisions about their lives often leads to predictable, sometimes tragic consequences.

The Program "Getting Ready" is truly concerned with involving this population in a decision-making process beginning with the first session of the training. This

program is a new hope for youth who are "aged out" from the care system to meet the challenges of the real world. The training has a unique and innovative process that can make the difference in the lives of these youth.

"Getting Ready" will develop contacts and cooperate with the local businesses, agencies, and companies that are interested in participating in providing job, mentoring, education, and other services to the youth who have completed the program; enabling them to be exposed to the "real world" and assume their responsibilities. The challenge is to provide youth in foster care not just with book learning but with opportunities to practice life skills in the real world.

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT

Statement of Informed Consent

This questionnaire in which you are about to participate is designed to explore your perceptions of the pilot Independent Living Program, “Getting Ready” in terms of its implementation and viability. This project is being conducted by Luz M. Varela, graduate student in Child Development Program at California State University San Bernardino and supervised by Dr. David Chavez, professor of Psychology Department.

The purpose of the development of this program was to offer another opportunity to the foster youths who are “aged out” from the foster care system to be successful in their adulthood transition. There exists a desperate need for youth to prepare themselves to receive the skills to become responsible citizens in our communities. It is not enough to provide independent living skills as a mode to comply with program requirements. We have a human responsibility to prepare foster youth to receive the skills and training necessary to engage them in healthy lifestyles.

The data from the attached questionnaire will be used for research purposes only and will not be individually listed on any report. The information from this project is confidential and your participation is completely voluntary. This questionnaire will take you approximately 20 to 30 minutes of completion. This research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at California State University, San Bernardino. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this research procedure feel free to contact David Chavez, Ph.D. and Project Supervisor at (909) 537-5572.

By placing a mark in the line below, you acknowledge that you have been informed of, and understand, the nature and purpose of the questionnaire and you freely consent to participate. You also acknowledge that you are at least 21 years old.

Your mark of consent here

Date

APPENDIX B
QUESTIONNAIRE

Survey for Professional Feedback

I. Identifying Information

- A. Gender: _____ Male _____ Female
- B. Are you currently employed? _____ Yes _____ No
- C. Who are you currently employee with? _____
- D. What is your current title? _____
- E. How long have you been working with foster youth?
- _____ 0 to 5 years _____ 5 to 10 years
- _____ 10 to 15 years _____ 15 or more years

II. Participant reaction

The following questions pertains to your professional opinion of the services that foster youth will receive from “Getting Ready” ILP implementation. Please circle the answers which most closely reflect your opinion.

- A. The program will provide foster youths with guidance when they’ll need to handle personal life situations.

1	2	3	4
strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree

- B. The program will be a support system while foster youth are preparing for adulthood.

1	2	3	4
strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree

- C. The program will offer foster youth the necessary tools that they need to gain self-sufficiency.

1	2	3	4
strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree

- D.** The program includes enough practical activities and learning experiences for the participants to reach their independency.

1	2	3	4
strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree

- E.** The program seems sensitive to the foster youth needs.

1	2	3	4
strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree

- F.** The program has viability to be implemented immediately and its goals appear reachable.

strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree
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- G.** The program includes one-on-one training which will help foster youth to reach their personal goals.

1	2	3	4
strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree

- H.** The program needs to be longer.

1	2	3	4
strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree

- I.** The program seems worthwhile and offers innovated activities that will prepare foster youth with their transition to adulthood.

1	2	3	4
strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree

- J.** When the foster youth graduate from the program they will feel prepared to live independently.

1	2	3	4
strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree

- K.** The program will help foster youth to develop support from resources within their community.

1	2	3	4
strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree

III. Open-ended Questions

A. What is the most meaningful service that the participants of this program will receive, and why?

B. What professional suggestions do you have to improve the services that “Getting Ready” will offer to the foster youth in transition to adulthood?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

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